BOOK REVIEWS

Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient. Reflections on Healing and Regeneration. Norman Cousins. 173 pp. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York; McLeod Publishing, Don Mills, Ont., 1979. $12.95. ISBN 0-393-01252-2.

In 1964, when he was 49, Norman Cousins, editor of the respected American magazine *Saturday Review*, contracted ankylosing spondylitis, a collagen disease; his physicians gave him 1 chance in 500 of recovering.

In this brief and engrossing account Cousins tells how he surmounted those odds using an unconventional combination of therapies that may well come to be known as the Pauling–Peale approach: massive doses (up to 25 g a day) of vitamin C and even heftier amounts of positive thinking.

Working with his personal physician, William Hitzig, Cousins set out to answer the question Is it possible that love, hope, faith, laughter, confidence and the will to live have therapeutic value?

Mindful perhaps of the monthly exhortation in the *Reader's Digest* that laughter is the best medicine, Cousins followed a systematic regimen of Candid Camera classics, Marx Brothers movies, E.B. and Katharine White's "Subtreasury of American Humor" and Max Eastman's "The Enjoyment of Laughter". He made the "joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect" and found that his astronomic erythrocyte sedimentation rate declined.

Cousins admits that it doesn't bother him at all that he might have been the beneficiary of "a mammoth venture in self-administered placebos", and he devotes a chapter to "the mysterious placebo" before going on to another on creativity and longevity, in which he pays particular attention to Albert Schweitzer and Pablo Casals. Schweitzer believed that the best medicine for any illness is having a job to do, plus a good sense of humour. Cousins enlists corroboration from the Book of Proverbs ("a merry heart works like a doctor") and from authors such as Sir Francis Bacon, Robert Burton, Sigmund Freud and Immanuel Kant, who wrote that laughter produces "a feeling of health through the furtherance of the vital bodily processes". Cousins even mentions that physicians can heal themselves in this way; Sir William Osler "advised doctors who are spiritually and physically depleted at the end of a long day to find their own medicine in mirth".

While noting that "with each new book on the potentialities of the human mind or on its influence over the autonomic nervous system, the gap has widened between the public and the medical profession", Cousins is by no means a doctor basher. After an account of his illness was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* he received 3000 letters from physicians, most of them supporting "measures that had figured in my own recovery — a well-developed will to live, laughter, and large intravenous doses of sodium ascorbate". Cousins was sufficiently encouraged to write a book. One of the most striking features of these letters, he says, is evidence of a new respect among doctors for the ideas of nonprofessionals, and Cousins concludes that his respect for the medical profession is undiminished.

Aside from a minor reservation about Cousins' rather unscientific tendency to use such expressions as "most doctors" and "many patients", I believe this intriguing book should have both an innate appeal to MDs and a vicarious one: they can see why this book has become a bestseller and why Cousins is still laughing.

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Atlas of Clinical Hematology. 3rd ed. H. Begemann and J. Rastetter. Translated by H.J. Hirsch. 275 pp. Illust. Springer–Verlag New York Inc., New York, 1979. $163.90. ISBN 0-387-09404-0

Mastery of the microscopic interpretation of blood and bone marrow smears is essential to the practice of hematology. Atlases depicting normal and abnormal cell structure have played an important role in teaching this skill, and probably no academic hematology department lacks one or more reference works on cell morphology.

Photomicrographs of blood smears and of bone marrow usually fail to reproduce fine features, such as cytoplasmic granulation and subtle distinctions of colour, such as those on which differentiation of one cell type from another is often based. This deficiency has been overcome by the use of finely detailed watercolour illustrations of various types of cells. Generations of hematologists have pored over